

TERU : Acting Chief, St/PR
Chief, D/S

28 November 1955

Chief, S/PM

Reply to RQM/OIS K-2933, 17 September 1955, re Forced Labor in the USSR.

Questions lettered:

a. Present forced labor population.

Forced labor population 1 January 1955 is estimated at 6.5 to 7.5 million with a wide margin of error. Comparison of the estimated number of people over 18 years of age with the number of enfranchised voters indicates that this estimate may be near the upper limit.

b. Number affected by the amnesty.

Two groups are affected: (a) those who were actually in labor camps and (b) those who had been discharged but required to live in exile.

The categories specifically mentioned are all those who had been sentenced to less than 10 years for:

- Collaborating with the occupiers
- Espionage
- Counterrevolutionary dealings with foreign governments
- Aiding and abetting anti Soviet activities abroad
- Anti Soviet propaganda
- Failure to report a contemplated counterrevolutionary action.

There are no statistics as to the numbers who are confined under such sentences but it could run as high as 2 million actually released and perhaps as many who are freed from the necessity of living in exile. A large proportion the latter group, however, has become adjusted to their present location and job and would probably not move.

Embassy Moscow (Dispatch 677, 19 September 1955, Confidential) is of the opinion that these provisions do not cover indigenous groups such as the Balts, Chechens and people of the German Autonomous SSR., who were exiled under special ukases.

c. Economic effects:

The 1955 amnesty is only the last of a series of measures which have been reducing the importance of forced labor in the USSR. In 1950 the size of the forced labor contingent was twice or nearly twice the present size. Since then most of the remaining POWs have been repatriated, the amnesty of 1953 may have released 2 million and it is probable that discharges through completion of sentences have exceeded new convictions. Also the free labor force has increased by 10 million.

Since there is a large deficit of males in the free labor force and since the forced laborers are predominantly male, release of appreciable numbers from labor camps will help balance the sex ratio in the free population.

The effect on labor costs will not be great since forced laborers have since the early 1950s been paid wages, in many instances at the same rates as free labor. Part of the wages have been withheld to cover part of the cost of maintaining and guarding the prisoners but even so the full cost of the elaborate camp system has not recovered.

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The chief economic advantage of forced labor to the Soviets has been the ability to secure workers for difficult work in isolated areas where free labor will not go without special inducements. Shrinkage of the supply of forced labor will necessitate the abandonment of some of these projects and in those continued with free labor wage bonuses will have to be offered and better living conditions supplied in order to attract free labor.

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